




Speech By  
**Jonty Bush**

**MEMBER FOR COOPER**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (11.53 am): I rise in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill. A public health emergency was initially declared in Queensland, under section 319 of the Public Health Act, on 29 January 2020 as a direct result of the COVID-19 outbreak and its pandemic potential for Queenslanders and for those who travel into and through this state.

I want to say at the outset that the effect and the impact of COVID-19 has, for the most part, been quite catastrophic for individuals, for families at risk particularly, for our small business community who have faced the brunt of lockdowns and for our school communities—students and teachers alike. No-one has been untouched in the past two years. I do acknowledge that we are weary. We crave the way things were before, and I feel those feelings too. I crave a reality that involves hugs and overseas adventures and sharing plates of food. For the most part, in Queensland, we actually do have those things.

Our reality here in Queensland is that this pandemic is not over. There is an argument for proportionate restrictions on where people can gather and the types of activities that should be shaped to make us safer when we do gather. As at 16 February this year, the World Health Organization reported over 414 million confirmed positive COVID-19 cases globally—which is extraordinary. The Commonwealth Department of Health reported over 2.6 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including over 4,700 deaths here in Australia. In Queensland, there have been over 500,000 confirmed cases, with almost 400 deaths relating to COVID-19 being Queensland residents. We heard yesterday in the member for Greenslopes' contribution the impact it has had on our healthcare workers. I believe he said that over 180,000 healthcare workers have lost their life through this pandemic. My thoughts are with their loved ones.

This is an unpredictable pandemic and its impact, as I have already said, has been felt across our health, our community and our economic systems. Fortunately, Queenslanders wrote the book on resilience. We have risen to the challenge and our effective public health response has enabled high vaccination rates to be reached across the Queensland population.

In my electorate, the vast majority of people are fully vaccinated—well over 90 per cent. In fact, in some suburbs 99 per cent of people are fully vaccinated. I want to place my thanks on the record to them. Nobody is rushing out wanting to get a jab for fun. We are doing it because we recognise the compelling and scientifically established need to protect ourselves, our loved ones, our neighbours, our community and our friends against an illness that can have immediate and fatal consequences.

The risk of adverse impacts to the health system, economy and the community still remains. We are seeing that play out now in our education and small business environments particularly which are again feeling the brunt of absenteeism. In late 2021, and aided by such high voluntary uptakes in vaccination, here in Queensland we did transition our approach towards one that acknowledged a need to adjust to living with and responding to COVID-19 within our communities.

As Queensland transitions to living with COVID-19, some restrictions may still need to be maintained or activated, such as mask wearing in areas of increased community transmission and vaccination requirements for high-risk settings. Recent events like the emergence of Omicron and the Delta variant before that serve as a clear and compelling reminder of how rapidly COVID-19 can spread, with the potential to significantly impact hospital systems. A rapid and flexible public health response is still required to protect the health, safety and welfare of Queenslanders and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Ongoing COVID-19 responses are likely to be responsive to the needs of local communities, with consideration given to those local vaccination rates and the health system capacity. It is critical that flexibility is retained to ensure that, as restrictions are eased and normal social and economic activity resume, appropriate public health measures can continue to be put in place where necessary to address ongoing public health risks and to protect our health systems.

Extending legislative measures past 30 April to support the public health response to the COVID-19 emergency will ensure Queensland remains well placed to respond to the changing nature of the pandemic and to support the government's long-term objective of safeguarding the health of Queenslanders and will support Queensland's economic recovery plan.

Extending the temporary legislative framework in the Public Health Act until the COVID-19 public health legislation expiry date will ensure that the Chief Health Officer can continue to apply any of the existing public health measures that may be necessary beyond this time. This may include measures and response to new variants that emerge and management of health system capacity. The discretionary nature of the CHO's powers under the Public Health Act provide flexibility in relation to the public health responses appropriate to manage the pandemic.

I have heard some of the objections and issues raised by members in relation to the bill. I also want to acknowledge the very strong views from some members in our community about the Queensland government—in fact, their views about many governments' legislative responses to managing COVID. Queensland's response, under the temporary legislative framework, has served Queensland well. It has driven our vaccination rates. We have a strong track record on keeping our schools open, on keeping businesses open. Absolutely there has been change and, where some industries have performed really well, others have taken an incredible hit, and we know this. We have put in place a number of financial relief and other measures to support those impacted through this extraordinary moment in our history.

In regard to comments about parliamentary oversight of the emergency powers and implementation, this legislative framework has been through relevant parliamentary committee inquiries. The CHO and his department are constrained to operate within this legislative framework and are still subject to overarching legislation, like the Queensland Human Rights Act. Regulations to extend the declared public emergency are also subject to parliamentary scrutiny and disallowance. This further temporary extension is a proportionate and necessary response to a global pandemic that is still with us. I commend the bill to the House.